

Genesis in Biblical Perspective: The Gospel of Christ from Genesis – The Greatest Chapter in the Old Testament

Genesis 15

By [Dr. Harry Reeder III](#)

I'm going to start out reading just the first six verses of the Genesis 15. This is our 26th study in Genesis. This is the truth. Genesis 15:1-6 says

[1] After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." [2] But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" [3] And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." [4] And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." [5] And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." [6] And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you. Perhaps when you saw the title of this sermon you might have thought "There goes a preacher hyping their sermon." It must be a hyperbole. What do I mean by the greatest chapter in the Old Testament because there are a lot of chapters there? I really believe this is the greatest chapter in the Old Testament. Perhaps you might come close to agreeing with me once we conclude this study.

There are a lot of reasons why I might be able to substantiate that claim. This is the book of Genesis which means this is the book of Origins which is the book of "firsts" and there are some firsts in this chapter. For instance, in Genesis 15, Abram who is called a prophet in Genesis 20, this is the first time the prophet formula is used. Whenever there was a prophet who would speak the Word of God he wouldn't speak what he didn't have so there was a phrase that was used to identify the prophets which was "The Word of the Lord came to them (the prophet's name)."

In Genesis 15 this phrase is used twice. The first time that phrase is used in all of the Bible is in Genesis 15:1; *[1] After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram...* Now God's Word comes to a prophet that will be passed on to us. There is another first that's here. The Bible says in Hebrews that God spoke long ago to the prophets in many fashions and in many ways including dreams and visions. Here is the first time the instrument of a vision is used for God to bring His Word to His people through a prophet. So there is the first time a prophet has been given the Word of the Lord and the first time a vision is used. One of my favorite titles for the Lord is "Adonai Yahweh" which means the sovereign faithful Lord. Right here in Genesis 15 is the first time it's used. The sovereign Jehovah or the sovereign faithful Lord is right here in this text.

One of the most powerful reasons for me this is the greatest chapter in the Bible, is this is the first time in the Bible, Genesis 15, that a phrase will be used here that will be used multiple times throughout the Bible. It is the phrase "do not fear." Here is it the first time it is used in the Bible and it will be used 180 throughout the Bible. There is another reason. I believe this is the greatest chapter in the Bible because it has the greatest verse in the Bible. You might be thinking "I didn't see John 3:16 in that chapter." John 3:16 is the greatest verse in the Bible but without the verse in Genesis 15 I'm referring to John 3:16 would be meaningless. There is a verse here in this text that will be quoted nine times in part and in whole in the New Testament. It is the crucial verse that defines, declares and reveals the Gospel of grace and it comes from Genesis 15. We will get to it shortly. Let's take a look at the passage first. How does it start off? It starts off in Genesis 15:1, *[1] After these things...* After these things means what has happened in Abram's life. Abram comes on the scene in Genesis 12. He is called out of the land of the Chaldeans. At age 75 he leaves that land for a land that God has shown him. After entering the land, he becomes frightened and in a famine he goes down to Egypt where he lies about his wife but God rebukes, disciplines and brings him back. He looks at the land before him and sees that him and his nephew are having conflict so he says to Lot "Which part of the land do you want?" and Lot pitches his tent near Sodom eventually ending up in Sodom. Abram then takes the land that has been promised and settles within it.

"After these things" then must refer to what has just happened in Genesis 14. Abram with his personal body guard, his army of 318 and three other families went out and defeated four mighty empires, kings, and armies that had come together in an alliance. He won a victory and freed up all the people that had been captured in the plunder and he came back. Now we come to Genesis 15:1 which says *[1] After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram"...* I believe there are two things at work here. One is why after the phrase 'after these things' would He say "do not fear"? Have you ever been engaged in a big athlete event or social event or academic event where there has been some great challenge in front of you? You have geared up for it and put yourself on the line then there is success yet so many times

afterwards comes an emotional and physical fatigue. Fatigue always leads to fear. Emotional, spiritual, and physical fatigue will lead to fear.

There has been this unbelievable moment where Abram the brave heart has won this marvelous victory and Melchizedek has said "The Lord has blessed you with this victory!" Abram returns and you can almost feel the energy flowing out of him with fatigue and on its heels come fear.

That fear would be multiplied by what? How would you have liked to have pulled off an amazing victory with some small armies over the four biggest nations in the world, where you have returned and you're now going to have to live in the middle of these four empires, with these four kings that could easily pull together hundreds of thousands of troops to come after you? Yes he won the victory but that's like the dog catching the car when he chased it. Now that he has it what is he going to do with it? Besides that there were five other kings represented by a leader, the king of Sodom and he has already not only tweaked the noses of these four mighty kings but he has tweaked the noses of these five city kings. The king of Sodom wanted to work out a deal with Abram and he said "No, I will not bow to you. I rest in the living God Himself." While he would worship the living God he would not consent to the deal the king of Sodom presented. So he not only has four mighty empire kings against him but there are five city kings and he is in the middle of all of these people with his 318 men. "Do not fear, Abram."

Then He gives him two reasons not to fear. Reason number one is the Lord says "I am your shield." He says in Genesis 15:1 "*Fear not, Abram, I am your shield...*" Now here is where the translation is really interesting. You can either translate it "*I am your shield and your reward from Me shall be very great*" or you can translate it "*I am your shield, I am your great reward.*" So which one is it? I have an idea, it's both. I am your Rewarder and I am your Reward. God says "Abram, you've got Me and I've got you." Your reward is great because I am your reward. Then with this interesting statement comes this interesting action from Abram.

If you were Abram in this situation, being fatigued from what huge event that just happened, what would you say next to the Lord after this statement from Him? I really don't know what I'd say but I can't imagine saying what Abram said. He says "Lord, I'm childless and I'm trying to put this thing together here." I would have thought something like "Thank You Lord" or "How's this going to work Lord?" or "Can You give me a sign, Lord?" I can understand all of that but Abram says "I'm childless" but God doesn't even blink. He responds to Abram's reaction to His reasoned promise and exhortation."

Abram is thinking what is this reward going to go to? The only possibility is an adopted son in my household that is there from servitude named Eleazer. I don't have someone to pass this onto. Then God says to Abram three things. Abram, you will have a child. More than that, you'll have a son. More than that, this child

who will be a son will be the first of a host of sons and children of yours that men will not be able to number. If you can number the stars then you can number the offspring I will give you. You won't be childless. Just wait until you see what I give you. I will give you a son from which there will be an innumerable host as your offspring, Abram. That's what I'm going to do for you. Then God doesn't stop there, God goes from a promised child to another promise and that's the land.

Before I read the passage I want you to see something here so that your Bible continually makes sense. You and I are saved by the eternal covenant called a covenant of grace that is ratified not by the blood of bulls and goats but by the blood of Jesus Christ. But God's covenant of grace doesn't just plop out in the Scripture. God reveals it progressively. He unfolds it. He starts with a series of covenants in that section of your Bible that is called the Old Covenant. He starts with Adam by saying to him "I'm going to give you a seed that will win the victory over the evil one, the serpent."

Then the Adamic covenant unfolds to the covenant with Noah in which God says two things; "I will preserve this world until My work of redemption. I will one day judge it by fire but I will not judge it again until My redemption has come and from your line, Shem, will come that Redeemer that Seed that I promised back there."

Then from Noah comes now the Abrahamic covenant, the covenant with Abram. That will be followed by the covenant with Moses, which will be followed by the covenant with David. Then we will come to the fulfillment of this covenant of grace, the New Covenant, with a Mediator who we can put our trust in, the sinless Savior Jesus Christ. There is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the Man, Christ Jesus. It is unfolding to that point. Your Bible is a series of covenants unfolding to that as God is unfolding it for you.

The Abrahamic covenant itself is unfolded. It starts in Genesis 12 which is step one. Abram come out and follow Me. The Bible says in Hebrews 11:8, *[8] By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.* In Genesis 12 God said two things to Abram. One is He said "I will make you a nation that will bless all the nations. In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." The second thing He said was "I will show you a land that you will go to." Step two in the Abrahamic covenant is in Genesis 15. There is a step three in Genesis 17 which we'll cover here in the near future. So what does He do with the second step? He will start building that nation with the son that Abram is questioning Him about. From that son I'll make a nation that you have not even thought of yet.

Remember the land I was going to show you I talked about in Genesis 12? I am going to give you that land and He starts describing that starting in Genesis 15:7-21 which says

[7] And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." [8] But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" [9] He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." [10] And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. [11] And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. [12] As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. [13] Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. [14] But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. [15] As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. [16] And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." [17] When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. [18] On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, [19] the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, [20] the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, [21] the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

This is so exciting. Here is a text where Abram says "Where's my child?" and the Lord says "I'm going to give you a child. It will be a son and from him will come an innumerable host that you won't even be able to number. I will not only give you this nation that you haven't even thought about but I'm going to give you a land which you haven't thought about." We will go over that more in another study. When Abram said "How will I know this" God did something very familiar to Abram. God set up a covenant ritual. When a superior took hold or conquered an inferior then the inferior was to serve the superior. The superior would take care of the inferior as long as the inferior served him then what was set up here was a covenant relationship. That covenant would be inaugurated by blood, a sacrifice and the inferior would walk through that veil of death, the cut pieces would walk through up to the superior and say "I will be faithful and if not then may it be done unto me what has been done to these sacrifices."

So the ritual is set up. Abram says "Lord, a child and a land, how will I know?" God sets up the covenant ritual. By the way, why all these animals? If you go through the Bible there are multiple types of sacrifices and every animal called for, for any sacrifice is pictured right here, even down to the turtle dove. All of the possible animals for sacrifice are brought. There is a separation of them as they are sacrificed. There is God and there is Abram. Abram comes upon a deep sleep where there is this moment of chaos and darkness. The animals of prey,

the buzzards and hawks would come down upon it and Abram would shoo them away. Then an amazing thing happened.

Passing from God to him is a flaming torch, a smoking pot with its incense rising. You know what that is, don't you? He said "Before I give you this land, your people will be taken down to a land." What's that land He is referring to in which they are going to be servants? It's Egypt and they will be down there for 400 years, then He'll bring them out when they are ready. God will let the wickedness of the Amorites come to its fruition and He'll bring the people out when they're ready for the land. He will bring temporal judgment pointing to an eternal judgment for all who will live in rebellion against God and then He'll bring them up to use them for the judgment of the Amorites. In so doing He'll give them the land and those people who dealt so treacherously with His people for 400 years will get judged also. When He brings them out they will come out with all kinds of possessions from those who enslaved them and with slaves of their own.

Then this covenant ritual is placed. When God brings them out of Egypt He will lead them by fire and the cloud. In this ritual it is pictured for you. There is the flaming torch and the smoking pot. It is God Himself, the superior, who comes to the inferior. It's not Abram who takes the oath and says "May I die if I'm not faithful to You" but it's God who takes the oath and says "May I die if I'm not faithful to you, Abram, and I will die because you will not be faithful to Me. I will pay for your faithlessness. I will send My Son to die for you." It is God who walks through the veil of death to secure His people. It's not Abram but God.

When God comes down He comes with His Word. He comes with a Word of power. I am your Shield, your Protector, and your Reward and in that comes great encouragement and hope. When God comes down to us, not only with a Word of promise, but with a Word of prophesy. He says "Here is what I'll do for you." One seminary professor told me "Prophesy is God pre-writing history." It is God writing down for you what He is going to do. Here God informs Abram as to how He'll give him the land. He will take them out of the land into slavery for 400 years and then He'll bring them out when it's time to judge those who are occupying the land. I'll give you possessions when you come out and of course we know it will happen because we know the story of the Exodus. It is pre-written history. Here is the Word of prophesy, of promise and of power. I am your Shield. God says that this rests on Him, "I am." It is God's power that secures this, not ours and that's why God walks through the covenant for us.

In those days, the person who made the covenant would say "I will die if I'm unfaithful." The person who is receiving the covenant, the inferior, who makes his commitment, says "I will die if I don't serve you." What is God telling us here? He is telling us that not only will He die to be faithful but He will have to die for you because you will be unfaithful. We're sinners and we can't save ourselves. God doesn't make a covenant that WE walk through. He makes a covenant that He

walks through for us. I want to close with just a couple of thoughts here from this text. The greatest verse in this greatest chapter is Genesis 15:16 which is quoted nine times in the New Testament. Genesis 15:6 says [6] *And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.* Here is a text that declares our salvation and that is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. So why is this the greatest chapter? This is the greatest chapter because in this chapter we found out we're saved not by what we do but by what God does. We're saved by grace alone. In this chapter we also find out how we're saved and that is through the instrumentality of our faith. Our faith isn't righteousness but our faith is the instrument whereby grace we trust in the One who is our righteousness. In this passage we see the Righteous One. The flaming pot and the smoking torch is Jesus Christ who will go to the cross to redeem us in this covenant of grace.

We come from different regions. There are different colors and nationalities represented here. There are different all kinds of everything. Why are we here today? We have a common salvation. Every single one of us are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone and it is declared here in Genesis 15:6. This is the Gospel of grace. Abram was saved by grace alone. When God comes down He brings His Word. When His Word comes what are we supposed to do? Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ. We're going to believe Him.

I want to give you three practical takeaways from this text. The first takeaway is one that I cannot walk by without reminding you that every Christian is in a spiritual war. You may be AWOL, you may be found lacking, you may be found wanting but we're all in a war and when you're in a war, what is your hope in this war as we serve the Lord Jesus Christ who has won the victory? The Lord God is our Shield, our Reward and God Himself is our Protector. It is not my ingenuity, my pastor or my church. I'm grateful for every teacher, discipler, friend and means of grace God has given to help me, through the preaching of the Word, prayer, the Lord's Table and for everything the Lord has given me but they are not my protector. The Lord is my Protector, my Shield, my Buckler, my Refuge, my Fortress and in Him I will not be afraid. He is also my Reward. Oh to look to heaven where I'll see George Whitfield, John Calvin, John Knox, Timothy, Silas, Martin Luther, Joshua, Caleb, Abram my father in the faith, but I have a feeling and my heart is screaming where I'll run by all of them to see Jesus. That is my heaven. My reward is my Savior, Jesus Christ.

Here is the second takeaway from the text for all who know Christ. Now, you know what history is. Maybe you don't know but I enjoy history. This text tells you why I love history. History is the record of man's actions (some benevolent, some malevolent) whereby God is revealing His eternal purposes. Okay let's sell Joseph into slavery. That's malevolence. Let's abandon Joseph because we hate him. That's malevolence. Let's see the malevolent Potiphar's wife or the malevolent prisoner who forgets Joseph or the malevolence of the brothers.

History records all of these malevolent and benevolent events but wrapped up in it all God is putting His people there for 400 years. He is preparing them for the land He is going to give them. He is preparing them to be His instrument to bring judgment on those who are in the land.

You see simply the record of man's acts (malevolent or benevolent) but history actually is the revealing of God's eternal purposes for His glory in all of the ages. Oh God our help in ages past and our hope for years to come. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Here is the third and final takeaway. Jesus is in this text and my last question is, are you in this text? You might be thinking, "Harry, what do you mean am I in this text?" The offspring of Abram is not those of the circumcision of the flesh. The offspring of Abram are all who by faith know the God who has saved you from your sins. That's what He uses this text for in Romans 4. I'd like to conclude by looking at Galatians 3 in the use of this text. I love Genesis 15 because grace is written all over the text. God saves us, protects us, redeems us and it tells us the instrument whereby we're saved is faith as we receive the gift of a Savior and the gift of salvation. It's credited to us as righteousness but I also love this text because Jesus is in this text. He is the One who goes through the covenant and thereby His death brings us salvation by grace. I also love this text because when He tells Abram He is going to show him his seed, his offspring, it is more than man can number, just look at the stars and I'll show you.

Galatians 3:5-9 says

[5] Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—[6] just as Abraham (quote from Genesis 15) "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? [7] Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. (Who belongs to Abraham? It is not those of the flesh but those of faith, the spiritually born again, circumcised in the heart.) [8] And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." [9] So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Are you in Genesis 15? Have you by faith received this Christ, who died for your sins so that you're forgiven, paid for your redemption and provides His righteousness? It's clear that heaven is for the righteous. Jesus will say to the righteous in that day "Come in." Today every one of you reading this will leave this by faith. By faith you will either believe that you will be able to secure the righteousness necessary to get into heaven or you today by faith will say "I am a sinner. I believe the Word of God that my righteousness is like filthy rags. This day by faith I repent, not only of my sin, but of my righteousness. I want a

righteousness that is counted to me, a righteousness that is given to me. I want Him who knew no sin, who was made sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. By faith today I look not to myself and my righteousness but I look to Jesus Christ, my Torch, my Glory, my Incense, and my Redeemer. I look to Him and put my trust in Him today, for His righteousness.” Oh what that will do to your life! That will bring joy, power, hope and encouragement. When you’re walking through a broken world you can walk through in the triumph of Christ for you are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Therefore if God be for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but sent Him through those broken pieces and delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? By faith today, whom will you rest in? Come to Christ and know the joy of just giving that away.

This past week we had this Sportsman’s Outreach and it was so much fun to see this and see people catching hold of bringing others to hear the Gospel through this. Some decided at the last minute to attend so we ended up at the last minute with 80 to 100 on a waiting list. As a pastor I always dread that moment in a church because there will always be some who’ll say “What do you mean there is a waiting list? I’m a tithing member here and you say I can’t get in?” I did hear of one father and son who was coming who had heard there were some on the waiting list waiting to invite some who did not know Christ, who said they wanted to turn their tickets in so that these others could come. I know some on the leadership staff tried to talk them out of it and the father said “My son and I talked about it and it was my son’s idea. My son went with the church to see the movie “The End of the Spear” and saw about the five missionaries. My son saw the moment where the son (Steve Saint) looks to his father (Nate Saint) who is flying before a tribe to bring the Gospel, who no persons has ever lived after touching with them and he says out of concern to his dad, “Dad, if it all goes wrong will you defend yourself?” His dad responded, “No son, we are ready to go to heaven. The Indians are not ready to go to heaven. So we will not defend ourselves. We want them to be ready to go to heaven.” My son told me there are people who need to come to hear how to get to heaven. Let me give them my ticket, he said.”

You can forget 6pm tonight. I don’t know what they’re going to do when they play the Super Bowl tonight but as soon as I heard that conversation I stood back from the phone and said “Touchdown!” This is it! The movie, the reading, the study, the event, this boy got it! It is to know Christ and the joy of giving Him to others. That’s Genesis 15. Come to this Savior and rest in Him by faith. You will pursue righteousness and you’ll do that because you love your Savior but it is His righteousness that will take you to glory. He is your Shield and your Rewarder. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You so much that we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the privilege of worshipping You this day, knowing that we're saved in Christ alone and that we have the gift of faith to receive that salvation all because of Your grace and mercy. Thank You for Your Word of prophesy, Your Word of power, and the picture in that Word that we could see our God walk through the veil of an atoning death for us. O God, our God, how we thank You! Friend, if you want to give your life to Jesus, confess what we just said by saying "I know I'm a sinner and I repent of my righteousness." If you'd like to pray with someone contact us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200. O the joy of knowing I'm headed for heaven because of forgiveness in Jesus! Jesus paid it all and all to Him I owe. Sin has left a crimson stain but He has made me white as snow. Amen.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).